

From the Public Works Office

by Addison Looney, Sr. Staff Engineer



UPDATES AND HEADLINES

- ✧ Mr. McMahan, the Interim Public Works Director, and his family are doing well the in aftermath of Hurricane Rita. He and his family live in Port Arthur, and evacuated to Lufkin. Thank you for your expressions of concern.
- ✧ Recently, several members of the Sanitation department were injured during their rounds by broken glass being placed in a plastic sack for regular garbage pick-up. Placing “sharps”, which can include broken glass (of any kind), directly into a garbage container without placing it first into another container that is not subject to being cut or punctured, is a violation of the City’s Code of Ordinances, and punishable by citation.
- ✧ Another complete crew was exposed to muratic acid fumes when a citizen disposed of the hazardous material in their routine garbage. Muratic acid is used to acid clean concrete – it has sulfuric acid as a component. The employees were very fortunate not to have splashed the acid on themselves, or to have inhaled more fumes than they did. Improper disposal of hazardous chemicals is a State statute and Federal statute offense. **PLEASE DO NOT DISPOSE OF HAZARDOUS WASTE IN YOUR REGULAR TRASH AND GARBAGE!!** These types of materials can include paint, household chemicals, pesticides and herbicides, and petroleum products.

✧ **New Ordinances:**

Ordinance No. 1590 – amended the rules concerning working hours and days. There are now provisions allowing more work on weekends and many holidays, as well as more exceptions to the working hours limitations. Passed August 8, 2005

Ordinance No. 1597 – Added Demolition Delay provisions to Chapter 5 (Buildings and Building Ordinances). This establishes the Demolition Delay procedure and provides for the City Council to determine the significance of a structure prior to its demolition. Passed August 8, 2005.

Ordinance 1602 – Established a total moratorium to new construction and modification of established structure footprints in the 1% storm floodplain area for six (6) months. Passed September 21, 2005.

Text of these ordinances are available through the City Administrator or Public Works offices during regular business hours, or at the City website, under City Administrator – New City codes.

- ✧ **Upcoming Office Closures** : The Public Works Office will be closed on the following days: Veteran’s Day, Friday, November 11; Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 24; Christmas Day (Celebrated), Monday, December 26; New Year’s Day (Celebrated), Monday, January 2, 2006. There will be NO permits or inspections on these days! Call the Public Works office at 826-0516 for specifics.

Health Department



- ✧ **Food Establishments** – All establishments preparing and serving food to the public are required to be permitted through this office. These facilities are periodically inspected for cleanliness and proper food handling. Patrons are entitled to see both the Food Establishment Permit and the most recent Food Safety Inspection score sheet at each place of business. Check out your favorite eateries and let them know you are concerned! If there seems to be a problem with a particular food establishment, let us know so we can set up an inspection.

There are also temporary permits for such activities as weekend fairs and carnivals. If your activity is preparing food on the premises, then you are required to have a temporary food establishment permit. Non-profit activities are not charged for this – we use the information to schedule the Health Inspector to visit the activity and help us insure proper cleanliness and hygiene is

being followed.

Garbage / Trash / Recycling

✧ **UPCOMING HOLIDAYS** : Veteran's Day, Friday, November 11; Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 24; Christmas Day (Celebrated), Monday, December 26; New Year's Day (Celebrated), Monday, January 2, 2006. There will be NO Garbage or Trash pick-up on these days! Call the Public Works Manager at 826-2138 for specific schedule details or pick-up restrictions.



✧ **BULK PICKUP SCHEDULE:** Bulk trash is picked up every other week. We will pickup the East side of Broadway the weeks of Oct 24 - 28, Nov 7 - 10, Nov 21 - 25, Dec 5 - 9, etc. We will pickup the West side of Broadway the weeks of Oct 31 - Nov 4, Nov 14 - 18, Nov 28 - Dec 2, Dec 12 - 16, etc. A printed copy of the schedule is available from our office. Additionally, the schedule is posted on the City's website. {See below for website address.} There is no pickup on City holidays.



✧ **RECYCLING:** The City recycling drop-off center [near the corner of Bluebonnet and Henderson] will maintain normal hours, except for the holidays listed above. Those hours of operation are Mon-Sat 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Sunday 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. The center is closed on City holidays (see above).

Our Center recycles the following: plastic bottles, aluminum and steel cans, glass, paper **[BUT NOT CARDBOARD!]**. Telephone books should be recycled per the instructions provided by SBC.

Due to cost and liability issues yet to be resolved, we do not have a Hazardous Materials disposal program. There are efforts being made to correct this problem. We will let you know when the new program is up and running.

Tree Trimming & Landscaping

Commercial tree trimmers, tree services, and landscape contractors are required, by Ordinance, to be registered with our office. If you are going to hire someone to trim your trees, please check to be sure that the firm you hire is registered in Alamo Heights. They should have a trimming license. If you question whether they are licensed, call us.



Each trimmer is required to call our office and tell us where they will be working prior to starting.

Commercial tree services are required, by Ordinance, to remove their trimmings and debris from the City themselves – **it is not the City's responsibility**.

Owners are responsible for vegetation overhanging into streets and onto sidewalks, as well as the vision clearance area at corners.

Trimmers, whether private or commercial, are required to paint all wounds and fresh stumps regardless of season.

CONSTRUCTION/REMODELING/RENOVATION/REPAIR



CALL THE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICE, 826-0516, FIRST!

Whenever you want to build, beautify, demolish, repair, or put up a fence, use this general rule: **A building permit is required for everything except painting and MINOR repairs.** Even small jobs require permits, including all utility work (gas, electric, plumbing) and heating and air conditioning.

Basic working hours for construction activities are Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, with one hour before and after for preparation and clean-up. There are a number of exceptions outlined in Ordinance No. 1590. To report a possible violation of Section 5-6, contact the Police Department non-emergency number and refer to a violation of Section 5-6 of the City's Code of Ordinances.

All new construction (residential and commercial) and all remodeling (residential and commercial) in excess of \$50,000 estimated cost require a review of the plans, as well as other construction and inspection requirements for work of any value. Contact us for specific details, application, and guidelines.



Utility Location is mandatory (by State Law). Call at least 48 hours in advance. The single point of contact is:

1 – 800 – DIG – TESS (1 – 800 – 344 – 8377)

Certificates of Occupancy are required for all businesses and firms serving the public. They are required BEFORE the business or firm opens its doors to the public! These certificates should be posted where clearly viewable by customers. If you don't see a Certificate of Occupancy – ask. If one is not available, please contact our office.

Commercial Signage

DO NOT PUT UP ANY SIGNS without obtaining a sign permit first. This includes temporary as well as permanent signs. Call 826-0516 for details, as well as for information regarding what types of signs are allowed by Ordinance.



Water Utility

[Visit www.edwardsaquifer.org for Edwards Aquifer level details.]



WITH FALL IN THE AIR, THE WINTER AVERAGE PERIOD (NOVEMBER THROUGH MARCH) IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER. IT IS NOW TIME TO START CONSERVING WATER AND REDUCING YOUR NEXT YEAR SEWER RATE!

All irrigation systems are required to have a backflow prevention assembly (BPA) installed between the city water connection and the irrigation system. There are no “grandfathered” systems. If you don't have a BPA on your irrigation system, please get one installed as quickly as possible.

All BPA units, whether for irrigation systems or other devices, are required by TCEQ (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality) to be tested annually to insure they function within design specifications. If your BPA hasn't been tested in the last year, now would be a good time to set up the testing with a State Licensed Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester. Should you need names of licensed testers, contact our Utility Manager, Bryan Roy, at 826-4225 or 826-0516. [We cannot endorse any particular tester, but we can tell you who has a valid license from TCEQ.]

TRAFFIC & PARKING

We receive many requests throughout the year for “No Parking” zones, speed cushions and other traffic- and parking-related topics.



In order to better serve you, our citizens, and yet be fair to as many as possible, we cannot just place “No Parking”, “STOP”, and other signs on the City's streets. Many of these actions require a City Council direction and Ordinance to go into affect. An Ordinance is particularly important if the feature that is desired is to be enforceable by the Police Department.

If you feel your intersection needs a change in stop signs, speed cushions are needed to slow vehicles down or other traffic and parking issues are needing our attention, please send us a letter, with drawings showing us what you want and explaining why.

We work with the Police Department to insure there is indeed a problem, and we also arrange for a radar speed trailer to be placed to provide us information concerning the traffic volume (count) and speed throughout a 24-hour period. We try to work with the requestor to understand the perceived problem, and to discuss the various possible solutions, with pros and cons. Once the research is completed, we present the facts and request to the City Council in open session for their decision and direction.



Boards and Commissions

There are three Boards or Commissions coordinating their work with the City Council and the Public Works Director's office. They are:

- 1 Planning & Zoning Commission
 - a) Concerned with recommending zoning actions and ordinance implementation/changes to the City Council.
 - b) Check the *North San Antonio Times* and/or City bulletin board for announcements.
- 2 Board of Adjustment
 - a) Concerned with reviewing and addressing Zoning Ordinance non-conformities
 - b) Check City bulletin board for announcements
- 3 Architectural Review Board
 - a) Concerned with commercial landscaping and signage issues
 - b) Check the *North San Antonio Times* and/or City bulletin board for announcements

If you are interested in these boards and commissions, contact a Board/Commission member or this office for more details.

Please note that individual notifications concerning Board and Commission meetings and agenda items are sent to all property owners within set distances from the address being discussed. By Ordinance, these notifications are sent to the address found in the Tax Rolls, as prepared and listed by Bexar Appraisal District. We use their web site information to determine the name and address of the owner to which we send the notification. If you do not receive a notification, please check the Bexar Appraisal record information. We cannot send notices to non-tax roll owners and addresses, nor are we set up to send to addresses other than that found on the tax rolls.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Our **Environmental Tip** is courtesy of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. Part of pollution prevention is "product substitution," that is, using a less toxic or nontoxic product to create a less toxic or nontoxic waste. Here are some ideas to try at home:

Insect spray for plants — Blend six cloves crushed garlic, one minced onion, 1 tablespoon dried hot pepper and 1 tablespoon pure soap in 1 gallon hot water. Let it sit for one to two days; strain & use.

Ant control — Mix 2 tablespoons boric acid, 2 tablespoons sugar and 1 cup water. Soak paper towels, place on dishes, set out for ants. Pour a line of cream of tartar where ants enter.

Air freshener — Simmer cloves and cinnamon in boiling water. Leave an opened box of baking soda in the room. Set out a dish of vinegar.

Furniture polish — Mix 2 parts vegetable oil and 1 part lemon juice. Apply, rub in, wipe clean.

[NOTE WE DO NOT ENDORSE THE ABOVE TIPS – TRY THEM AT YOUR OWN RISK.]

Tips: Check plumbing carefully before purchasing a home

While most home buyers cite location, price and school system as their primary considerations, prospective purchasers should be aware of potentially costly plumbing problems, which often surface after a family has settled into a new home. A recent study found that as many as 44 percent of consumers call a plumber within a year of purchasing a home.

The average home plumbing system represents approximately 8 percent of a home's value, so the plumbing in a \$200,000 home is valued at \$16,000. To help avoid costly problems, the experts at Roto-Rooter, North America's largest provider of plumbing and drain cleaning services, recommend watching for telltale clues when shopping for a home:

- Straddle toilets and rock back and forth on each foot. If the floor feels spongy, it probably has water damage.
- Slow flushing toilets may indicate water pressure problems or partially clogged pipes.
- Press on the walls where tiles meet the tub. If they're soft or loose, water damage has occurred behind the tiles.
- Turn on the water in the bathtub then the kitchen sink. If there is a noticeable reduction in volume, pipes may be partially clogged by mineral build-up.
- Check pipes in basements and crawl spaces for rot, mildew or signs of leaks and recent repairs.
- Make sure the house has an accessible main sewer "cleanout" port.
- Water heaters over 15 years old should be replaced. The first four digits of the heater's serial number represent the month and year of manufacture).
- Make sure the gas water heater vent is a "class B chimney" or at least 6 inches away from wood.
- Make sure water appliance hoses have a good seal and aren't cracked or worn.
- Check for water damage inside cabinets beneath sinks. Turn water supply valves on and off to test for leaks.
- Marshy spots or areas of especially green grass in the front yard indicate possible breaks in water or sewer pipes.

WEATHERIZATION (COURTESY OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY)

"Warm air leaking into your home during the summer and out of your home during the winter can waste a substantial portion of your energy dollars. One of the quickest dollar-saving tasks you can do is caulk, seal, and weather-strip all seams, cracks, and openings to the outside. You can save 10 percent or more on your energy bill by reducing the air leaks in your home."

Further weatherization and insulation tips are available from the Public Works Office for the City of Alamo Heights. Call 826-0516, or drop by during regular business hours.



Visit the city website at www.ci.alamo-heights.tx.us for information on these and other topics, such as City Ordinances, fees, etc.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE, especially the Public Works section. Please keep in mind it is still a work in progress. Let us know if there is other information you would like to see.